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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3870
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0723
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

UNCLAS ANTANANARIVO 001289

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR AF/E, AF/FO, INR/AA, AND DRL
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: President Ravalomanana Launches Madagascar Action Plan

REF: A) ANTANANARIVO 1269

B) ANTANANARIVO 405

1. (SBU) In a cleverly-timed publicity event November 10 -- two days before other candidates could officially campaign -- President Ravalomanana unveiled his Madagascar Action Plan (MAP) to media, GOM officials, donors, and others at Antananarivo's main sports stadium (ref A). The "MAP" is the GOM's official five-year strategic document to implement the President's vision of "Madagascar Naturellement," and is meant to replace the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) effective January 1, 2007. The MAP is also the brainchild of Harvard Professor Dean Williams, ringleader of foreign gurus assembled at the Presidency.

2. (SBU) Building in part on the consultative process required to complete the first Millennium Challenge Compact in April 2005, the President's team conducted extensive consultations throughout Madagascar's 22 regions over the last several months. Few Embassy interlocutors in top positions reported working on much of anything else of late. "This is the business of the entire nation," Ravalomanana declared, underlining the Plan was written by mayors and other regional officials, civil society, private sector operators, and "simple citizens."

The End of "Mora-Mora"

3. (SBU) Donors and observers generally accept the MAP, particularly its process, as a positive -- if somewhat over-ambitious -- strategy for Madagascar's future (ref B). Post, along with the World Bank, European Union and other major donors, is cautiously optimistic the plan will encourage development; with the key caveat that motivation and efficiency must be maintained throughout implementation. The MAP predictably addresses the country's many development challenges and attacks President Ravalomanana's top concern: the prevailing "Mora-Mora" (slowly, slowly) complacent attitude of most Malagasy. The President, labeled an "alien" by some for his unique dynamism and entrepreneurship, insists rapid development is possible if the Malagasy change their mentality.

4. (U) The MAP is a five year plan with eight priorities: responsible government, reliable infrastructure, transforming education, rural development, family planning and combating HIV/AIDS, strong economic growth, environment, and national solidarity. Each axis of effort includes a detailed strategy, down to the regional and local level, complete with metrics to hold responsible officials accountable.

5. (U) The eighth platform, national solidarity, includes ambitious development priorities to promote equitable growth,

protection of the most vulnerable persons, and investment in women. In summarizing his development priorities, the President seeks to "forge a strong and unified national identity which respects and values the multiple Malagasy traditions."

Campaigning for Development Priorities

¶6. (SBU) To the extent Malagasy voters care about the issues, President Ravalomanana, with his MAP and campaign platform, is the only candidate to articulate a detailed plan for Madagascar's development. For that matter, he is alone among 14 candidates in talking about the future. Perhaps given the simple common sense of the MAP, or its broad consultative process, to date not one opposition candidate has criticized Ravalomanana's Plan or offered an alternative. Instead, candidates obsess about the 2002 crisis, call Ravalomanana illegitimate, call for the December 3 election date to be postponed on constitutional grounds, and demand a transitional government (septel).

COMMENT:

¶7. (SBU) At a minimum, President Ravalomanana had the sense to hire a speechwriter with his or her pulse on the heart of the Malagasy people (and the donors). While sometimes met with skepticism, his MAP does resonate with ordinary citizens, to the extent they have time to pay attention, as well as the elites. Post assesses the MAP is more than campaign promises, and embodies the impatient businessman's burning desire to lead "Madagascar Inc." into big profits in the coming years, just as Ravalomanana did with his Tiko empire. END COMMENT.

McGee